

A MERMAID NEMESIS

BY D. M. HENDERSON, JR.

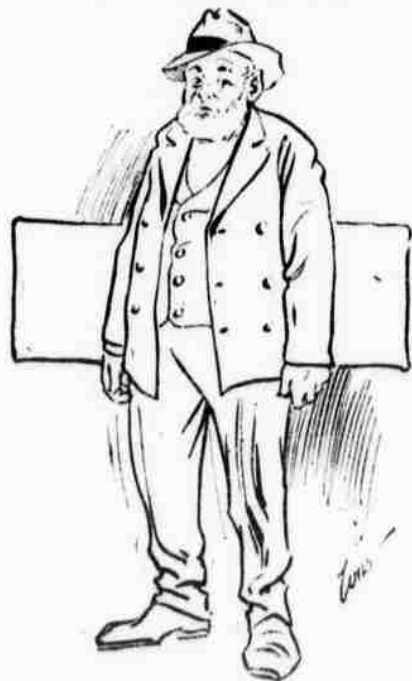
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The apple of the Widow Stubb's eye was her boy Sam, a lean, freckled youngster. Perceiving this, Peter Blowy and Silas Bliggs, captain and mate, respectively, of the "Salmouth Siren," vied with each other in making much of him. Over the bar of her tavern, "The Mariners' Rest," the widow remarked to the two that she was worried about Sam's health, whereupon the captain responded quickly that it was a shame to see such a bright, handsome face looking so peakish. The mate, outdone, energetically nodded his sympathy with this view. The captain, following up his advantage, recommended a certain tonic. Then the mate was seized by a great idea.

"What this dear little feller needs is an ocean trip!" he said, impressively. "I'll take him on our next un', Captain Blowy willin', and I'll give him a father's care and bring him back with roses in his cheeks!"

"Delighted ter hev him!" the captain immediately responded, slapping his knee to show his appreciation of the plan, although he scowled darkly at his mate when that gentleman's back was towards him. Mrs. Stubb, after hesitating long, consented, and the many warm glances she bestowed upon Silas convinced him that he had made a ten-strike.

As was their custom, the rival suitors met in the widow's parlor upon the Sunday evening following. Their vessel was to set sail the next morning, so each was anxious to unburden his heart to his hostess. When the clock's hands neared eleven, Silas, seeing that the captain had determined to sit him out, arose. With a malicious glance at his rival, he excused himself for not staying later. Since Samuel—whom he was to assume charge of that evening—was used to retiring early, he announced, he meant him while in his care to continue in the wise habit his good mother had taught him. As the wily mate had counted upon the opportunity came while he was waiting at the door for the boy, Mrs. Stubb was quite overcome when he stammered his petition, a condition which, while lamentable at the time, gave Silas blissful memories to carry with him, since during the moment of



Captain Blowy.

collapse the widow's plump form reposed in his arms. Recovering, she told Silas cooly that the memory of her dear Stubb had not allowed her to contemplate a successor to him, but that she felt indeed honored at such an offer from such a person, and that she would try to see whether Stubb's place in her heart might not be shared by another.

Silas, who had not expected a more favorable answer at that time, bade her adieu contentedly, feeling that the captain's persuasive powers could earn him no better answer than the one he secured, and that if he could retain possession of his tramp card—Sam—he would have nothing to fear from the captain upon their return. The surly greeting he received from that gentleman the next morning went to confirm his belief.

The "Salmouth Siren" sailed, and after an uneventful voyage reached her destination and discharged her cargo. As they were about to weigh anchor for the return trip a boat rowed hastily out to the ship. A rough-looking fellow came aboard and was ushered into the cabin. The curious Silas took his stand a few feet away from the open cabin skylight.

The stranger was speaking. "My boat's off Blimley Cove!" were the first words Silas heard.

"A day's trip this side o' Salmouth! Then you can look for us about the first o' next week," the captain replied.

"I don't want ter run agin' the law!" said the stranger, dubitably.

"Rot!" came from the captain. "Foller my directions an' you'll come out all right! The night after we reaches Blimley Cove I comes ashore with the mate and the kid. You foller us. The mate an' I goes in fer a drink at some 'longshore tavern, leavin' the kid outside, the company inside not being fit fer one of his innocence to 'sociate with. The place I picks out ter leave him is a lonely un', so you comes along an' nips him. You keeps him on your boat till I tells you when an' whar' ter land him. When you brings him ashore I happens along, huntin' fer the lost Sammy! We has a leetle set-to an' I rescues the kid! It's simple!"

"I'm blowed if I likes the job!" the stranger answered.

"Pshaw!" responded the captain. "Taint nothin' but a leetle joke, an' I'm goin' ter pay you well for it!"

The two arose, haggling over a price for the job. Silas walked away. The mate was aghast at his rival's cunning plot. He trembled when he thought of the pinnacle the captain would reach and the depth to which he would sink in the widow's estimation if the plotters succeeded. He was seized with a wild desire to flee the vessel with Sam, but his charge was nowhere in sight and the sailors, the stranger having pulled off, were weighing the anchor. When he grew calm he set himself to plan a way to frustrate the rascally scheme, but although he spent many an hour in thinking over the situation, the only determination he arrived at was that when the "Salmouth Siren" reached Blimley Cove he would stick to Sam like a leech.

The boat was within a day's sail of Blimley Cove when a severe storm arose. In the evening, as great wind-driven sheets of rain beat the deck and vivid flashes of lightning lit up the plunging bark weirdly, the captain sought his mate's company for the first time during the trip. Silas, occupied by his troubles, seeing that the captain had been drinking, paid little heed to his maudlin talk. But as the captain, growing superstitious under the combined influences of the liquor and the storm, unfolded his pet belief that the destinies of ships were controlled by strange sea folk, Silas grew interested and then agreed heartily with the captain. When they separated Silas was deep in thought.

About midnight, sobered by the storm, the captain had taken the wheel. Suddenly, above the noise of the gale, he heard a strange voice calling him. By the faint light from the cabin skylight he made out, forward of the wheel, a grotesque figure. At

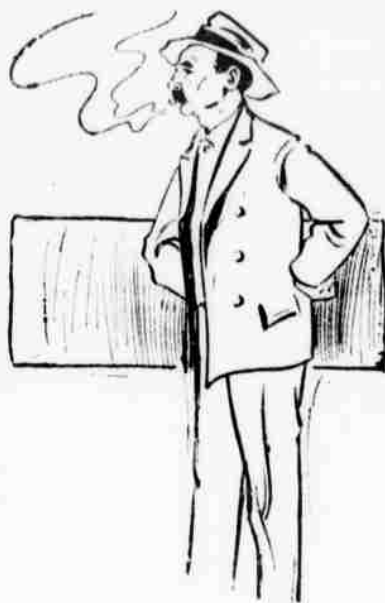
he peered a continued flash of lightning disclosed a mermaid. A mass of long yellow hair half veiled her face and streamed over her shoulders and from her neck to the end of her long, fish-like tail, phosphorous radiated.

The captain shivered. "Who air you?" he gasped.

"The mermaid what looks after this here craft's fortune!" the creature hoarsely answered. "I hev' come to warn ye, Peter Blowy, that destruction waits the 'Siren' at Blimley Cove! It air a punishment fer yore evil doings!"

"I jest meant to hev a leetle joke, good mermaid!" bawled the captain, in his excitement, letting the mermaid's peculiar pronunciation escape him. No answer came. The mermaid was vanishing. The skipper remained transfixed with terror until the gleams of phosphorous shone no longer. Then he staggered to the companionway and bawled for the mate. When, after an exasperating delay, Silas appeared, the skipper with an oath instructed him to set a straight course for Salmouth and went below.

Two evenings later, shortly after his mate had gone ashore, Captain Blowy entered his cabin, intending to don his shore clothes. He found upon the cabin table a huge bundle. Opening it curiously, he discovered a mass of unraveled hemp, fashioned into the shape of a woman's wig; a huge fish-tail, made from two pieces of old canvas cut to the required shape and basted together, with an opening at its largest end large enough to admit



Silas Bliggs.

a man's body, and a box of wet sulphur matches, labeled "The phosphorous you seed!" With these articles was enclosed a note stating that the remainder of the "mermaid what looked after the 'Siren's' fortunes" could be found that evening at the "Mariner's Rest," where a full account of why and how she appeared could be heard.

Silas had conquered; his discomfited rival sought liquid solace that evening in a strange tavern.

Silas, when Sam had been sent to bed, seeing that his highly-colored story of his rival's dastardly plot and its frustration had caused favoring winds, set sail for and reached the Port o' Love.

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This was followed by a wild chase around and around the room over chairs and tables, with both hands clapping the air. The guest was dazed with fright, when suddenly there was a climax. The hostess brought her hands violently together. "I've got it! I've got it!" she screamed in triumphant joy. She had caught a moth—Atchison Globe.

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